

MRS. NINNIE B. (NEWBY) MILLER

(Wife of John J. Miller)
Haskell County, Kansas

Written by Maxine Ridge

Reference: A writing about Mrs. J. J. Miller of Sublette, Kansas in about 1935 and the 1926 Kansas Woman's Journal story

** Additional information added about Ninnie B. (Newby) Miller*

*For information on Ninnie (Newby) Miller's brother, Robert Newby
See Haskell County Story: THE BLIZZARD OF 1886*



THE MILLER FAMILY

1903

*Left to Right: William, Ninnie (Newby) Miller, baby Wilma, John Miller, and Martha Helen
With Robert in the back
Clara and Mamie (born after 1903)*

Photograph provided by Karen Emerson

Mrs. Ninnie B. (Newby) Miller, born in Seymour, (*Jackson County*) Indiana, came with her father's family to Kansas in the fall of 1884, living with them on the homestead in Southwest Gray County. The homestead was on the line between Gray County and Meade County and one mile east of the Haskell County line. The nearest trading place was not the best place to trade, so the family had to go forty-four miles to Garden City for

their supplies. Sometimes they went to Dodge City, but this being so much farther, they didn't make the trip there very often.

The primary source of fuel was buffalo and cow chips. Mrs. Miller and her brother took the wagon and went out on the prairie to gather buffalo chips shortly after moving on the homestead. They found wigwam poles that the Indians had left there. Mrs. Miller believes that the Indians had been frightened away and had left the poles. At any rate, the chips made fuel for them for some time.

After moving onto the homestead from Indiana, the children were very lonesome. Sometimes when their folks went to town for supplies, Ninnie and her sister, Mat (*Martha Newby Unsell*) stayed at home and felt alone.

Ninnie made the wish that they could see one of the apple carts as they had in Indiana. She remembered a branch up in front of the wagon with apples stuck on it. Along towards the dark, they saw a wagon coming. When it pulled into the yard, it was just what they had wished for, an apple cart. It was an apple grower from southwestern Kansas, bringing apples to the homesteaders to buy. Ninnie said it relieved their homesickness and helped them believe that wishes do come true.

Ninnies' first school was located in the very northwest part of Meade County. It was very near her home. The schoolhouse, built of sod, was very small, being ten by twelve feet in size. Ten pupils were attending the school.



In 1893, when Ninnie was 24 years old, she taught school here. At that time, it was a sod schoolhouse. In 1899, this framed building replaced it. The owner of the land that the school was on was George Macon. The last class taught there was in 1935.

Thanks to Kirk Coats for providing the schoolhouse photograph and details.

The homesteaders were never really bothered by Indians. One time some cowboys thought it would be fun to frighten the homesteaders. They sent one of the cowboys out to tell the homesteaders "the Indians were coming". Many folks started in their covered wagons to Garden City for protection, but Ninnies' father would not go because he did not believe the cowboy's story. Ninnie said she was so frightened that she did not sleep any that night. However, the Indians never appeared.

There were many prairie fires, but the most disastrous one seemed to cover the entire southwest. It extended from the Cimarron River to the Arkansas River. All vegetation, homes, and many lives were lost in the fire.

Sometimes Ninnie went by her nickname, "Nin". She was very helpful in hauling water from the wells from neighboring ranches. They paid 10 cents per barrel of water, and she would sometimes dip water out of the swamp area for household use. She learned from the cowboys to purify the water with burnt cactus.

To help organize a Sunday school at a neighboring ranch, Nin would ride horseback to help get the younger folks of the area to the Sunday school meetings. These were the first ever held in the great southwest.

When the family came to make headquarters, they got six-quarters of the land all in one body. Ninnies' claim was a quarter of school land on which she resided in a covered wagon to have legal proof the land would soon be hers. Once she came of age, she lived there in a sod house that her father and brothers built for her until the land was legally hers. She lived there until she married John J. Miller, editor of the Santa Fe Monitor, on March 26, 1896.

After they were married, there was another very destructive prairie fire. The family was entertaining company at Sunday dinner when they noticed a haze in the distance. They thought it was the start of a dust storm, but soon found that it was actually a prairie fire. They all rushed from the table and grabbed brooms, gunnysacks, or anything to help fight the fire. The men got their horses and plows and started to fight the fire. Two stacks of hay that belonged to Ninnies' father became inflamed. Her nephew tried to save the hay but ended up burning his arms and face. Ninnies' mother thought she would put some linseed oil on the burns but, by mistake, got the varnish and put it on the burns. The pain eventually stopped, but it took the varnish some time to wear off his face and arms.

In July of 1918, John and Ninnie Miller moved to Sublette in Haskell County, where Mr. Miller purchased the Clipper Newspaper and changed its name to The Monitor. The paper was founded in 1888, and today (1936) it is still in existence.

Ninnie Miller became the mother of six children, and Robert, (1897-1945) the oldest, served his country overseas during the World War. He was in Germany, Belgium, and France for over nine months. Robert was married shortly after returning home from the war on July 28, 1920, to Miss Hazel Cottrell. He worked with his younger brother William,

running the Miller Motor Company in Minneola, Kansas. After his brother's death, he continued to run the motor company.

Martha Helen Miller (1898-1987) married Rolley L. Wells (1890-1973), a Methodist minister, in Guymon, Oklahoma, on June 1, 1921.



Rev. Rolley Lewis & Martha Helen (Miller) Wells
Photograph provided by Kirk Coats

William Lawrence Miller (Born on 27 Sep 1900 in Haskell County, Kansas) married Miss Esther M. Rannells on June 4, 1924.

Wilma Florence, a successful teacher of several years, married Walter E. Preedy (on 6 Aug 1924 in Garden City, Kansas), and they lived on a farm near Sublette.

Clara Blanche Miller was her father's helper on the Sublette Monitor. She was married on January 3, 1926, to Perry K. Cummings. Clara and her little daughter (*Kathlyn Mina, born in 1926*) were killed in a car accident on March 6, 1930. (*Both buried at the Haskell County Cemetery in Sublette.*)

Mamie Elizabeth Miller, their youngest daughter, graduated from high school at the age of 16. She taught school in Sublette and was married to Mr. Cecil Cooper Baker (on 23 Aug 1925 in Sublette, Kansas), who at present (1936) is the principal of the Sublette Grade School.

Ninnie Miller was of Scotch-Irish and English descent. After being a teacher in her youth, she developed into a leader of social affairs, women's clubs, and was a Methodist Church member. Today she continues to be a very faithful church worker. She has represented the church at many of the conferences held in Kansas. She also belongs to the Methodist Ladies Aide and does everything she can to improve the community.

John and Ninnie Miller raised their children as Methodists and were staunch Republicans.

CHILDREN OF JOHN AND NINNIE (NEWBY) MILLER



*Back Row, left to right: Wilma & William
Front Row, left to right: Robert, Clara, & Martha Helen
About 1905 – Mamie was not yet born*

Photograph provided by Karen Emerson

Ninnie Miller speaks about two outstanding oddities. One of them was the terrible black dirt storm that swept Kansas on May 14, 1935. It resembled one of the Prairie fires in the daytime, only at night, the prairie fire made the sky a great blaze that could be seen for miles and miles. After the prairie fire had begun to die down, the atmosphere became full of yellow smoke and made everything look yellow-red.

There were also times when the days were so hot and windy that it resembled today's drought. Sometimes, the wind was so intense that it was impossible to dry the clothes without them "being whipped to pieces". If the buffalo grass was still growing, due to the land not yet worked, the wind did not blow.

Ninnie Miller would get up early to do the washing, leave it in the tub of water during the day, and hang the clothes out at sundown to dry them. It was so hot and windy that while the children slept, she would hang a wet towel over the buggy or crib to keep them

cool and keep the wind from blistering their faces.

Mr. Miller was born on October 15, 1860, in North Manchester, Wabash County, Indiana. In 1882, he came to Kansas. He worked at the Emporia Republican Newspaper under Governor Eskridge. While there, he became acquainted with some notable Kansas newspapermen, including Jake Stotler, J. M. McCowan, and other men. Since the year 1886, his work has been identified with Western Kansas. He worked for the Garden City Herald, and in 1890, he came to Haskell County. Besides conducting the newspaper, he was in business as a merchant for several years at Santa Fe, where he and Ninnie Miller made their home for some time. In a 1907 government session, he represented Haskell County in the Legislature.

He was made chairman of the committee on printing and a member of the irrigation and education committees. Mr. Miller made and introduced a bill for the abolition of high school fraternities in Kansas. He secured the passage of the bill. When the special session of 1908 was held, Mr. Miller supported the primary law, which was passed, and the railroad and depositors guaranteed fund legislation. Mr. Miller was made the Under Sheriff of Haskell County, and he was the last mayor of Santa Fe. He held the offices until the town organization was abandoned. Mr. Miller was an active member of the Santa Fe Lodge of Masons. He was a charter member of Santa Fe Lodge, Independent of Odd Fellows, and for many years, he was a member of the Modern Woodmen of America.

Mr. Miller became ill and was sick for some time before he died on Oct 24, 1930. At the time of his death, he was the oldest newspaperman in Western Kansas.

Mrs. Ninnie Miller has had many deep sorrows. She lost one of her sons, a daughter, a granddaughter, and her husband, all from December 1929 to October 1930. One more grandchild has also passed, leaving her with nine grandchildren.

Her children are all near enough that she can visit with them often. She has spent much of her time of late visiting with her children. Her health was not so good during the winter, but she is enjoying good health now.

Ninnie has many happy days when the children and grandchildren come home and gather around for family festivals. Today she is making her home with her youngest daughter since Mr. Miller's death. Ninnie owns property in Sublette in the business district. She rents one of her buildings to a barber and one to Mr. Piland, who has a cleaning shop in part of the building.

Additional Information

MRS. NINNIE B. (NEWBY) MILLER

NINNIE KATE BLANCHE (NEWBY) MILLER, daughter of Robert Green Newby (1830-1908)

and Martha Elizabeth Patrick (1829-1908), was born on 19 Dec 1869 in Seymour, Jackson County, Indiana. She married **JOHN JACOB MILLER**, son of Adam Miller (1831-1896) and Helen Elizabeth Dodge (1834-1895) on 26 Mar 1896 in Gray County, Kansas. John Miller was born on 15 Oct 1860 in Wabash County, Indiana.

Children born in their marriage were **ROBERT JOHN MILLER** (1897-1945), **MARTHA HELEN MILLER** (1898-1987), **WILLIAM LAWRENCE MILLER** (1900-1929), **WILMA FLORENCE MILLER** (1902-1977), **CLARA BLANCHE MILLER** (1904-1930), and **MAMIE ELIZABETH MILLER** (1907-1987).

John died on 24 Oct 1930 in Sublette, Haskell County, Kansas.

In 1940, Ninnie was living with her daughter, Mamie, and son-in-law, Cecil Baker, in Sublette.



Ninnie (Newby) Miller in her later years
Photograph provided by Karen Emerson

Ninnie passed away on 22 Nov 1951 in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. Burial for John and Ninnie was at the Haskell County Cemetery in Sublette.

Newspaper Marriage Announcement

The Garden City Herald, 28 Mar 1896

John J. Miller, the editor of the Santa Fe Monitor, was married Wednesday to Miss Nannie (Ninnie) B. Newby of Haskell County. The wedding was a quiet one, with only a few guests being present. The happy couple has gone east on their wedding trip and were accompanied as far as this city (Garden City) by Mr. Sam Newby and Miss Bessie Hill.

The Herald extends congratulations and requests that John take to himself all the nice things that he has written about other young people in the same situation.

Cemetery Headstones



HASKELL COUNTY CEMETERY

Sublette, Haskell County, Kansas

Headstone photographs provided by Leon Barton

